

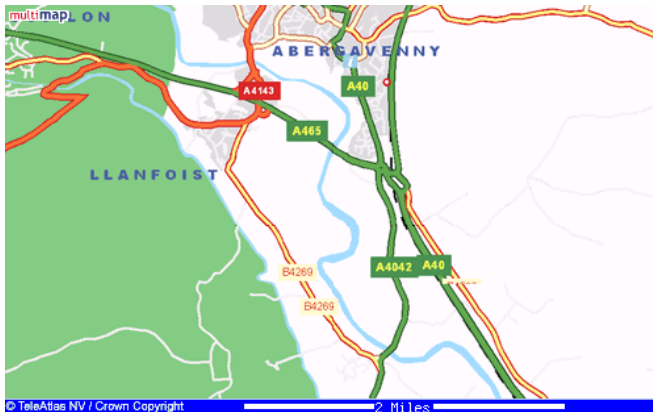
Was the refusal of the McDonalds planning site fair and justified?

Aim

I aim to investigate the reasons behind the refusal of the McDonalds, and then judge whether these were fair and justified. I also aim to find out why they didn't pursue their aim when their original plan got thrown out and to see if it was likely to succeed if placed somewhere in Abergavenny, and if so, then why.

Background Information

In 2001, Campaigners defeated the McDonalds fast food giant by forcing planning permission for a proposed McDonalds restaurant on the outskirts of the small Welsh town Abergavenny to be refused. McDonalds felt this was an excellent place for an 82-seater restaurant for a number of reasons. These were because of its positioning next to a town, which means that it offers a wide customer base, and a good area to



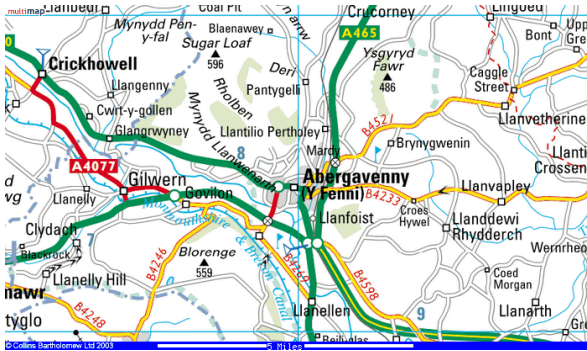
advertise to. The area is also placed next to the 'heads of the valleys' road, which runs parallel to the coastline along the top of all the valleys that lead down to the coastline. This road is regularly full of traffic running through to the west of Wales, which means that there are plenty of potential customers which can be advertised to on their way along the main road (Fig 1), and may also go into the restaurant because they simply feel like something to eat, and as the restaurant is placed on a junction, it

provides easy access to. They also felt it would be an excellent place as there is a very nearby estate, in fact on the other side of the road (Fig 2), hence even more customers. Planning inspectors turned down the proposal for safety reasons, citing that the restaurant was inaccessible to residents of Abergavenny except by crossing the A465 heads of the valleys road. The refusal was hailed by anti globalisation protesters as a victory against the American giant by small town protesters. McDonald's however has never been successful in South East Wales and has only three restaurants in the whole area.



The Location Of Abergavenny

Abergavenny is a small town situated in the South East of Wales in the centre of Monmouth County. (As you can see from figure 3, 4 and 5)



Here is a picture taken of Abergavenny from above the town itself. (Fig 6)

Asking A Geographical Question

I decided to investigate whether the refusal of McDonalds planning permission was fair and justified, in order to this I will need to understand the reasons behind the refusal, and whether they could have easily have been overcome, obviously if this is the case then the refusal would not have been fair or justified. I will also look at whether McDonalds could have succeeded in Abergavenny. I will look at this by getting the views of the local government, and the people in the area, and to follow this through into how it could succeed, if at all, in Abergavenny.

To investigate these questions, the main primary information would be what sort of views the public hold in Abergavenny and what reason the council gave for the refusal of the planning permission. I will look at what views the public hold on the McDonalds case, and to get this information I would have to ask people in Abergavenny. I will also need information about the economic layout of Abergavenny, to see how competition from McDonalds would have affected the town and to see whether McDonalds could have overcome this competition to prove successful.

Planning the Investigation

To undertake my enquiry I firstly made a list of all the techniques I could possibly use to investigate my question, once this was done I reviewed my list and discounted some of the worse ones.

From this I decided that I would need to centre on primary information that I could obtain from people as this gives many different viewpoints, and a good idea as to

what the people of Abergavenny think. I decided that to investigate the people's opinion in Abergavenny, and the effect of this opinion, I would need to conduct either a survey or an interview. I discounted using an interview, as it would only provide one viewpoint, and possibly a lot of useless information, also in the town it would be hard to find people who would be interested. I did however recognize that using an interview as a source could provide valuable information I had not thought to ask myself, so I compromised and developed a questionnaire incorporating direct questions and open questions.

The only problem with the questionnaire and asking the people is the fact that due to this not being a most recent event many will have forgot about it. So I will actually include these in my results, however I wont in calculating the chance of success that McDonalds would have in Abergavenny. Also due to the time of day I was expected to carry out this survey I was unable to get a full range of ages, as all children were at school, so I will also need to take this factor into account when looking for patterns, views and calculating McDonalds chance of success in Abergavenny.

I will also conduct a traffic survey of the road that the site was proposed to be situated on, as I know safety was a major issue here, I will also visit the site and weigh up whether the reason that the council gave for refusal were fair. I will conduct the traffic survey by standing at the junction of the road, and counting the number of cars that travel past in one minute, I will also guess the average speed they are travelling at when they are approaching the junction in order to help me see how dangerous the road is.

I have come up with 10 questions for my questionnaire, most of them are closed questions, with only a few possible answers, however 2 are open to give me an idea of the reasons and feeling behind the people in Abergavenny. I also feel that if I have a questionnaire that people can answer quickly it will also be more likely that they will take part in it, and give reliable, useful answers.

My questions are:

1. Do you remember the McDonalds plan? (Y/N)
2. Did you like the idea? (Y/N)
3. Why? (Open question)
4. If a McDonalds restaurant had been built there, would you go there? (Y/N)
5. If so what transport would you have took? (Car/Bus/Walk/Other)
6. If you didn't like the location, can you think of a better place? (Name of place)
7. What do you feel about the safety issues related to where McDonalds where proposing to build there restaurant? (Open question)
8. Age?
9. M/F?
10. Where from?

I chose to ask these questions as they are straight to the point and quick but also give me valuable information into answering my geographical question. All of the questions are useful to me, and they will all help me with the opinions of the people in the town, and also help me to split these opinions up into groups if possible. Question 3 and 7 also give people the chance to have there say on two of the major problems with the McDonalds plan, and again will help me with my question, and

may also help me in saying whether the council were right for the reasons they gave.

I will also gather some newspaper articles from the time of events to see what the feel of the whole town was and to see if there were any other issues that I hadn't discovered, and it will also help me in seeing if my data is reliable, as I will see how closely the patterns match what is said in the newspapers.

I have also conducted a risk assessment before I go and carry out my investigation, thus helping me minimise any injuries that may occur. I will have to be extremely careful of the road when conducting my traffic survey, as they travel past at great speed. However there is also another risk I must bear in mind. The fact that the subject was a few years ago will obviously show as many people may not be able to remember it, or may have changed their views since the time the plan was put forward, so another risk would be receiving incorrect data, something in which I will have to bear in mind when finding patterns, etc.

However before any of this was to be done I visited Abergavenny town centre (Fig 7) and the proposed McDonalds site and conducted a site survey and Market Survey.



The site survey would contain such things as; what the site is like, is it safe, what the surroundings are like and where it is actually located. The Market survey would contain things such as where the people are from and what their views are of Abergavenny, but more importantly what their views of Abergavenny's food industry is like. In doing this it would help

me to look at the reasons the people were giving me, or the things I read in newspapers, and it would also give me a better knowledge of the town and site and why McDonalds chose this site over other local ones.

Collecting the Information

Site Investigation

The site is in a field, sold by a local farmer at a big profit, next to a small housing estate on the A465 Monmouth road. There is a large ring road near to the site, which is the main route to all the main towns in the surrounding area. These towns do not have McDonalds either and it shows that business would be brought in from these areas. Abergavenny is an access point from these towns. Another mode of transport nearby is the railway station, which is in quite close proximity to the site. There is a possibility that railway-goers may use McDonalds.

The field in which McDonalds wants to build in acts as a playing field for children on the estate in the present time. Obviously, this would be a negative prospect for the residents of the estate as children would have nowhere to enjoy themselves outside

because the area is made up of predominately busy, main roads, which are unsafe for children to play near.

I looked into some house prices of the estate and found that the houses sell there for around £170'000. It is in my views that the people who occupy these houses generally earn a good living and relatively well off. I feel this as many of the houses occupy 'sky' dishes and burglar alarms, which indicates a certain amount of wealth. These features suggest that they have expensive objects inside their houses and therefore want to protect them. There were several houses with conservatories, which again shows a certain degree of wealth.

It is for these reasons that the residents may be worried about a McDonalds on their doorstep. This is because fast food restaurants such as these have a habit of creating problems, notably:

- Litter - As in the way that the food is packaged, such as in bags and in boxes that need to be disposed of, it is unfortunate for local residents to accumulate McDonalds litter from customers who dispose of their rubbish in the wrong fashion.
- Noise - As these sorts of places are open from early in the morning until late at night, they are in constant use. And can prove to get very congested with customers and noise levels proving to be a nuisance for local resident
- Crime - This would increase due to more people visiting the area, such as youths who would frequently use the area.

Market Survey

To investigate the market area, I asked random shoppers in Abergavenny where they are from. I asked 20 people and these were my results:

- Abergavenny residents x 10
- Monmouth x 4
- Merthyr x 2
- London x 2
- Cardiff x 1
- Cornwall x 1

The results show that a considerable amount of shoppers come from the local area or within Wales. Reasons for this attraction may be due the popular indoor market that sells a wide range of product. However it is extremely unlikely that a person comes from London just to shop in Abergavenny Market. The pull of Abergavenny can be seen as some of the places that people have come from are a fair distance away, as Monmouth is 16 miles away.

I also went round some of the most popular shops in Abergavenny such as: Boots, Burtons, and local newsagents. I did this to ask customers where they had come from to shop in the town, the most common places to occur were:

- Abergavenny
- Monmouth
- Brecon
- Pontypool

I visited a local newsagents and asked an employee what percentage of customers were local, tourists or from remaining areas. The response was that:

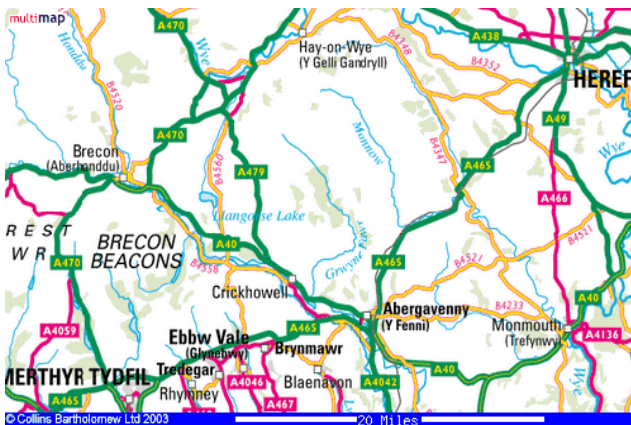
- 80% were local residents
- 5% tourists
- 15% from remaining areas

He said that the indoor market was probably the main source for people visiting the town. I also realised that the seasons and days would affect the number of people shopping in Abergavenny. And as I went on a cold November Wednesday morning, I predicted that the turnout would not be very good and that instead if I would have come in a summer weekend I would have been likely to find a lot more people from surrounding areas and tourists.

Traffic Survey

Upon conducting my traffic survey at the 'Heads of the Valley Road' I found that it was a very busy a well-used road.

I found out that 25 vehicles pass this point in one minute. That is a vehicle every 2.4 seconds. I also found out that on average every one in five of these vehicles was an articulated lorry. I also made an educational guess that the average speed they passed this point at was about 50-55 mph. I feel the reason for this is due to it being such a popular road, it can get you quickly and easily across the country (fig 8 and 9), and being an A road it is hardly surprising they go at such quick speeds.



Councils Views

To look whether the refusal was justified I was required to give the reasons why the council refused planning permission to this site. The reasons are as followed:

- They felt the site was unsafe to access and so had to be scrapped. One Planning Inspector said that many drivers would be to concern about what was happening on the road to notice anybody crossing this busy 'Heads of the Valley' Road.
- They felt many were against the idea of a McDonalds coming to Abergavenny.
- They also felt a litter problem would come about if McDonalds was built here, and so chose against the idea.

- They also felt that any problems could not be overcome, and so the proposed site was a very bad idea, as it was mainly unsafe.
- However they felt that the safety reasons were enough to refuse the plan, without even looking at anything else, as they felt it would create a lot of pointless and un-needed accidents.

Questionnaire

Finally the results of my questionnaire:

Question	1	2	4	5	6	8	9	10
Person								
1	Y	N	N	N/A	Best place	40-50	M	Aber
2	Y	Y	N	N/A	N/A	30-40	F	Aber
3	N	N/A	N	N/A	N/A	60+	M	Aber
4	Y	Y	Y	Car	Best place	40-50	F	Aber
5	Y	N	N	N/A	N/A	40-50	F	Aber
6	Y	Y	Y	Walk	Best place	18-30	M	Aber
7	Y	N	N	N/A	N/A	40-50	M	Aber
8	Y	Y	Y	Car	Best place	30-40	M	Aber
9	N	N/A	N	N/A	N/A	40-50	M	Aber
10	Y	Undecided	Y	Car	Best place	40-50	F	Aber
11	Y	Y	Y	Car	No	40-50	F	Aber
12	Y	N	N	N/A	No	60+	F	Aber
13	N	N/A	N	N/A	N/A	60+	F	Aber
14	N	N/A	N	N/A	N/A	40-50	M	Aber
15	N	N/A	N	N/A	N/A	30-40	M	Aber
16	N	N/A	N	N/A	N/A	60+	F	Aber
17	Y	Y	Y	Car	Best place	40-50	M	Aber
18	Y	N	N	N/A	No	30-40	F	Aber
19	N	N/A	N	N/A	N/A	18-30	F	Aber
20	Y	Y	N	N/A	No	60+	M	Aber
21	Y	Y	N	N/A	No	60+	M	Aber
22	N	N/A	Y	Car	Best place	60+	F	Aber
23	N	N/A	N	N/A	N/A	18-30	F	Aber
24	Y	Y	Y	Car	Best place	18-30	M	Aber
25	Y	Y	Y	Car	Best place	40-50	M	Aber
26	N	N/A	Y	Car	Best place	18-30	M	Aber
27	Y	Y	Y	Car	Best place	40-50	M	Aber
28	Y	Y	Y	Car	Best place	30-40	M	Aber
29	Y	Y	Y	Car	Best place	18-30	F	Aber
30	N	N/A	N	N/A	N/A	18-30	F	Aber
31	Y	N	N	N/A	No	18-30	M	Aber
32	Y	N	Y	Car	No	60+	F	Aber

Question 3:

Reason:

- Don't like McDonalds (5,31)
- Doesn't want one here (12,32)

- Likes McDonalds, thinks one is needed locally (6,11,25,29)
- One is needed (2,4,8,10,17,20,21,24,27,28)
- Dangerous/Unsafe site (1,7,18)

Question 7:

- Can be overcome (2,4,6,10,11,17,20,25,27,28,29)
- Dangerous (1,5,7,12,18,31,32)
- Not dangerous at all (8,21,24)

(N.B: the numbers in the brackets are the person who either said or agreed with this idea)

Secondary Information

I have also looked at newspapers in Abergavenny and Nationally from the time of the event and found some newspaper cutting that give me other views on the McDonalds enquiry. (Fig 10, 11 and 12) (at the end)

Analysing and Interpreting

There were many reasons why the council refused planning permission, but were these fair and justified? Also from the people's opinion in the town, do I feel that McDonalds could have succeeded in Abergavenny?

My results have helped me to answer these questions easily as they all work with each other; the council's reasons tie in with the public's view on what they want, and what they think. Also the traffic survey ties in with the public's view of whether they thought it was safe or not.

"I would use the McDonald's, although I wouldn't let my kids go there by themselves as that road is very quick running, perhaps a walkway would do the trick"

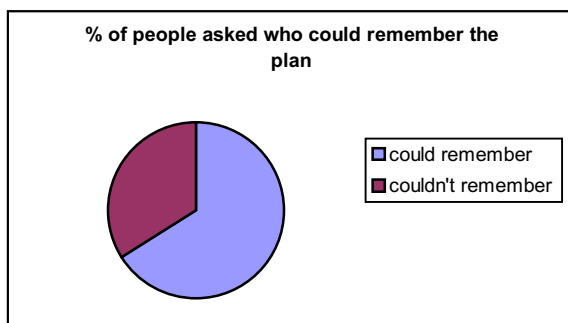
I do not feel the council were justified with their reasons for refusal for a number of reasons. I understand how they think it was unsafe, as shown by the number of cars and lorries that pass, and the speed they travel at, but I think it is very unfair of the council to say that this problem could not be overcome.

Many people thought that with the right frame of mind this problem could be easily overcome, one person said;

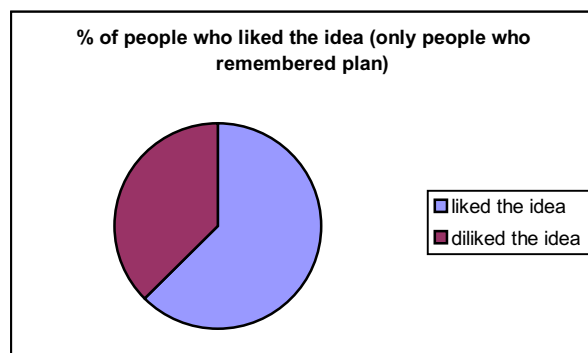
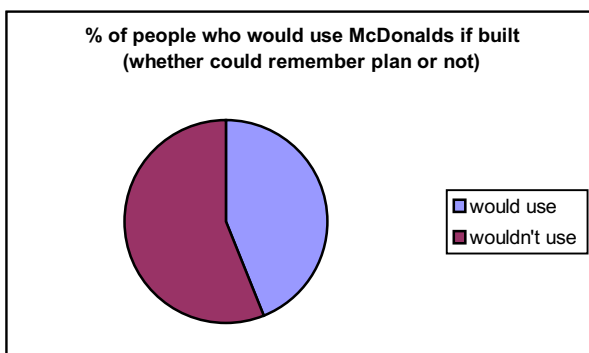
"I think it's a stupid reason for refusal, all it will take is a little walkway or underpass"

And I don't think that McDonalds would have minded funding a little project in order to make it safe. All it would need would be a bridge to cross over the road, and then no accidents should occur. Also then motorists would have no need to worry about hitting people, and could therefore concentrate as much as needed on the road. So I do not feel that this part of the refusal was fair and justified. I also don't feel that the part of the refusal when they said the safety problem could not be overcome is fair, as there are a number of ways it could be, most easily a

bridge leading over the road to the other side. So again I do not feel this was fair or justified.



They also felt many people were against the idea of McDonalds coming to Abergavenny, but in fact, from the survey I conducted, I found out that out of the 66% of people that could remember the plan (Fig 13), that 62% of the people thought it was a good idea (Fig 14), and that 44% of the people would go there if it was built,



whether they remembered the idea, or not, or liked the idea (Fig 15). Also I must take into account the fact that there were no school children about at the time of day the survey was conducted, and so with this in mind I think those numbers would rise even more if I questioned school children. So once again I do not feel the council were right in saying that nobody wanted to restaurant there, as at least half did, not including school children, so once again I feel that this reason was unfair and unjustified.

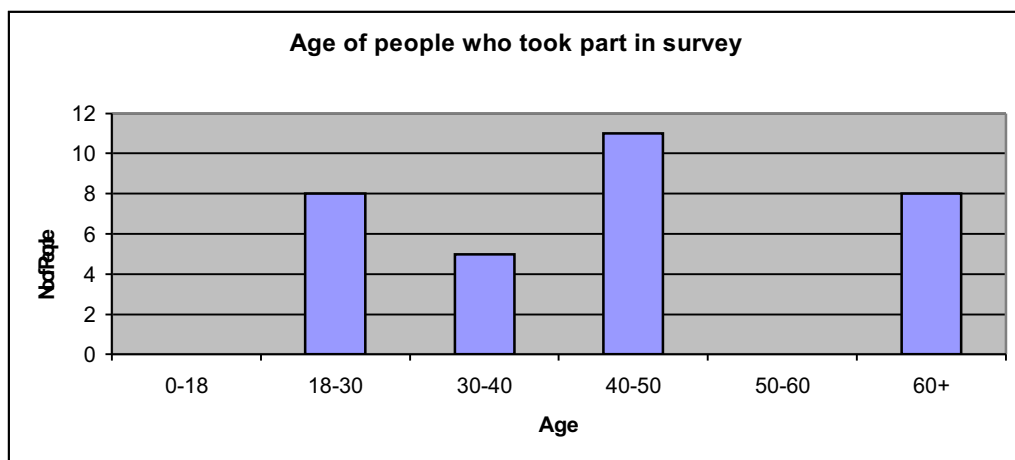
Finally they said littler would be a problem for the area if a McDonalds was built, unfortunately I did not conduct a survey on this, however, I have visited a numerous number of McDonalds sites and found that no one of them have litter problems. Also, surely if this fast food restaurant would cause a litter problem then others in the town would too, however once again this is not the case, as I found that Abergavenny was a very clean town, with almost minimal litter, so yet again I feel this reason given was unfair and unjustified.

However if we look at the newspaper articles from the time of events is seems many people in fact stuck up for what reasons the council were giving for refusal, which is something very different to what I have found out in my recent survey. Each of the three articles are against McDonalds coming to Abergavenny in some way. However it is very hard to say which one is more reliable as the newspaper articles are from the time of events, but also they have a reputation to twist things to how they want it to sound, but my survey is a few years after the events, so some people

may have changed their views, but due to it being face to face with no pressure from others it is a lot more likely to be truthful.

To conclude I do not feel the council thought their reasons through fully enough, as I do not feel one of them is actually correct, fair or justified. I also have proof against this, and so I feel that the council were just unfair on McDonalds, as they had a very good argument and a very good site, however all I can say to them, is better luck next time!

To find out whether McDonalds would have succeeded I needed to know the views of the people, and as said before with 66% of people keen on the idea of having a McDonalds in Abergavenny, and out of the 32 questioned, 44% saying they would go there now if it was built I feel I have some good data to investigate this. However as said before I could not interview/questions any school children due to them all being at school, and it would be an educated guess to say that if theses were questioned, the figures would go up in favour of the idea. In this survey I only managed to ask 8 people aged from 18-30, 5 people aged from 30-40, 11 people aged from 40-50 and 8 people aged 60+ (Fig 16)



With this in mind I think it would be hard to say whether McDonalds would succeed in Abergavenny. As half of the people questioned around the town would use it, but you also have to think of the people travelling in cars and lorries. These people would also use it, as it would be no trouble for them to access it if the restaurant was situated at the 'Heads of the Valley' Road. It would be easily accessible for them and would not be out of there way, also it would be one of the only food places within quite a big range of distance, and so stands to make even more custom because of this.

So I do feel McDonalds would have succeeded in Abergavenny as most of my data goes in there favour, they would receive a lot of custom from neighbouring towns, and also from passers by, who are travelling on the 'Heads of the Valley' Road. I also have to think whether school children would use this restaurant, and so in order to find this out I conducted a little survey at my local McDonalds, I found that 7 in 10 people who use McDonalds are under the age of 18, and so with this in mind I feel

that this would be the same sort of figure in Abergavenny. So I feel that the children would bring even more custom to McDonalds making it succeed even more.

Conclusion and Evaluation

As already stated I feel that the council were very harsh towards McDonalds and their application for planning permission, and I don't not feel any of their reasons for refusal were fair or justified. I also feel that McDonalds would succeed in Abergavenny because of the number of people who liked the idea, and the number of people who said they would use it.

I feel my personal conclusion is the same as the logical one, as I think that McDonalds were wrongly refused, and that they would succeed, especially as the fact as it would only be the third McDonalds restaurant in the whole of South Wales.

I feel my investigation matched my plan very well, as I tried to keep to it as much as possible; I kept all of the same questions, and also tried to ask the widest range of people possible in order to get the fullest results. I did not make any major changes to my plan, as I felt that my plan was very well thought out if I wanted to succeed in answering the questions I had asked. I stuck to it and it seems to have paid off as I have got the results I wanted, and also answered the questions in full detail, using my results to back up my reasoning and logic.

I do not feel there are many improvements I could make, apart from maybe try to get more results, and also try to get the results at a time when school children will be around in order to find out what they think on the matter. I feel my questions have been answered well and so there is very little improvement that can be made there, and also I feel that my data is easily adequate enough to supply my needs, in order to answer the question. The only other improvement I can think of is that it would have been better if I would have done an investigation closer to the time of this debate going on, as I have no doubt many people have forgot about the debate and also many people have probably changed their views on the matter. This would have also gave me much more accurate results to base my conclusion on, and so therefore would have been much more likely to be true, however I feel I have completed my investigation thoroughly and to the best of my ability with the results and information I could acquire.

The only thing I feel is left to do is for McDonalds to apply for planning permission again, whether it be at the same spot or a different one, as I feel they should have not give up last time, as they found a very suitable spot with an excellent case to support it, I just feel the council were very harsh on them, however with the right persistence of the matter and the right frame of mind and views, I feel they could overcome any problems the council give to them, and succeed in getting planning permission for the site, and succeed in business in the Abergavenny area.

By Thomas Melia